

Breaking Old Ties

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Summary: Part Three of the "East Meets West" series- An old friend's ties to the Irish mafia put Maggie and the rest of the house in danger.

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>Maggie O'Rourke sat hunched over a table in the back room of O'Connor's pub. She screwed her face up tight and frowned as she went over the figures in the account book for the ten thousandth time.

>"Douglas! Douglas!" After a moment a large, burly six foot red headed and red bearded Irishman entered. Douglas O'Connor owned the pub, and Maggie had taken it upon herself, for a small addition to her wages of course, to help him keep the books in order.

>"Douglas, is dis right? Ders got ta be a mistake here." She pointed with her pencil to the expenditures of the last month. Douglas frowned,

>"No, looks right ta me lass."

>'Do ye mind tellin me den, what the devil yer doin spending dat much on rum and whiskey?"

>"Look around ye girl, dis is a bar." Maggie gave him a look that showed she was clearly not amused.

>"Douglas, look at these two pages. Dese are da costs when ya let me make da run, and dese are da costs when ya leave it ta Colin, Marcus, or yerself. Do we see a pattern?" Upon inspection, it was revealed that the costs when Maggie bought the liquor were drastically lower.

>Douglas gave her a look, "An what do ye mean ta say by all dis? I should let you buy da beer, is dat wot ye want."

>Maggie put her hand on his shoulder, "No no no, yer doin just fine with da Guinness. I'm jest sayin dat I tink as so far as de hard liqour is concerned, I get better deals. And ye know dat I kind find da best stuff to, none of dat watered down "fixed up" shite."

>"Dis wouldn't have anytin ta do wit da run I was plannin on sendin da boys on tanite, wold it Maggie my love?" Maggie grinned.

>"What a great idea! Yer a genius Douglas O'Connor. I'll be back by seven."

>With that Maggie hopped off her stool and sprinted through the doors out into the main room. She hopped over the bar to take off her apron and grab Colin's old coat, worn out at he elbows and too long, but it was warm. Douglas was waiting by the bar, a piece of paper and a small sack of cash in his hand.

>"Here take it, there is enough in der fer me ta buy all I need, so I'm sure ye'll leave plenty in der if yer as good as ye tink. An 'heres da list. We're low on brandy, whiskey and rum. Don't ferget da vodka and sherry, Sam's back in town. Plenty a gin too, the Martin's jest had a another boy." Maggie glanced over the list and shoved it in her pocket. She headed towards the door.

>"Wait!," Douglas seemed a little bit nervous. "I hate ta ask it, but where are ya planin on buyin dis?"

>Maggie smiled, "I figured Sullivan and Finn's fer da whiskey an vodka and da Red Dog fer da sherry."

>"What about da rest?"

>Maggie gave Douglas a condescending glance. "Ya know fer yer own good I can't tell ya about dat."

>Douglas groaned. "Maggie! Ye can't be buyin liquor from da bloody mafia! Do ya want ta get me killed? Want ta see me hangin by me own entrails from de streetlamp? Me, with a wife an children ta support, who'll mourn me an be farced ta live in de streets."

>A shout came from upstairs. "Don't ye listen ta his belly-achin Maggie! I never wanted him ta start a tavern! A nice little boardin 'ouse, dats all I wanted!"

>Douglas glared at the ceiling. "Bernadette! Kindly stay outta tings dat don't concern you!" The only response was a curse muttered in Gaelic and a bang as something was thrown against the wall. Maggie rolled her eyes.

>"Relax, Douglas. Go back an finish with da books, I'll have ta get workin when I get back." She headed for the door. Douglas grabbed his hair in both fists and looked up to the heavens.

>"Relax she tells me! All right! I'll relax! But you'll be sorry when dey are comin in here and choppin off me fingers all because me cheeky little slip of a bar girl insulted on of der boys. Just you wait!"

>Maggie shook her head, very amused. "Douglas, you have nothin ta worry about. Yer fingers are perfectly safe." She opened the door and walked out, calling over her shoulder as she left, "Dey take yer toes first!"

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>Maggie whistled and skipped out into the afternoon sun. She headed out of Brooklyn Heights and across the Brooklyn Bridge. She cut over to 2nd avenue, following it as far as 42nd street and cutting through Mid Town till she hit 8th avenue and was in the Kitchen.

>Hell's Kitchen had been, since the civil war, a den of the sleaziest, dirtiest, mist despicable criminals in New York. Even some of the underground leaders avoided it. But it was the place to go if you wanted good liquor. All you needed was an in, and Maggie had one. She took 9th Avenue up to 47th street. About halfway down the block there was a dirty, rusty metal door with the number 314 painted on in chipping white paint. Maggie passed the door and went down the ally. The side door to the kitchen was open, and she slipped in. She nodded to Julio, the head chef, and went about finding the busboys.

>She happened upon Bobby Francia as he was dumping a load of dishes into the sink. She snuck up behind him, covering his eyes. "Guess who?"

>"Maggie, there are other ways of starting a conversation you know." Bobby never had been one for jokes. Maggie shrugged as he turned around,

>"Sorry, I'm here on business, and I'm kind of in a hurry." Bobby nodded, waiting for her to go on. "Have you seen Patty tanite?" Bobby shook his head.

>"Nope, haven't seen him. But we did get a request from table 7 to bring them some..." He stopped shuffling in his pocket, "Here it is. They wanted some 'bloody corned beef and cabbage and don't burn it this time you bunch of limey bastards.' And about three gallons of Guinness have gone out that way too." Maggie grinned,

>"Sounds like my Patty. Thanks Bobby!" With that she scooped up a tray and entered the main room, heading straight for the table for two in the back where Patty met his clients. Luckily, he was alone. Maggie put the tray on the table and slid into the seat. Patty looked up, surprised, but not too surprised.

>"Good Evenin Maggie my girl. What can I do ye fer?"

>Maggie produced the list. "I need brandy, gin and rum. I'd say about a weeks worth. But an Irish weeks worth. Plus we've got Sammy in town and another addition to the Martin clan."

>Patty looked up, "Ya mean Shamus has another one? Jesus, like bloody rabbits dey are." He took another swig of his beer, then wiped his mouth on his sleeve. "All right, come wit me. A large order like dat I'll need ya ta make de selections."

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>Maggie was dwarfed by the big dark haired Irishman. Patty had been a friend of her father's, and she had known him since she was a toddler in Doolin. Unfortunately, while in Dublin Patty had found a talent that paid more than fishing. And it was his job with the Irish mob that got him sent to America a year before Maggie's family came. In the time since, unsatisfied with being owned by Mickey Flynn, Patty went freelance, and though he promised Maggie that the infamous hitman in the headlines wasn't him, he still kept to the shadows.

>As they walked they came upon a group of men arguing the street. They wore long black coats and appeared to be dragging a man across the street into a building.

>Maggie looked up at Patty, whose mouth was set in a firm line.

>"Friends of yours?"

>"Jest keep yer eyes straight ahead an keep walkin." Maggie frowned and did as she was told.

>They reached a shop that said "William's Antiques", Patty opened the door and held it open for Maggie to walk in. He nodded to a man behind the counter, who walked ahead of them to an old clothes press against the back wall. He took out a set of keys; first opening the press, then stepping in and opening a small door in the back of the press. He motioned for the two to step inside.

>They entered a room not seen by the general public. An exclusive liquor store that Patty's profession gave him access to. He and Maggie strolled along the racks, Maggie surveying and then deciding on which brands and vintages she wanted. Patty called over Wemick, the clerk. An aging man, Wemick recognized the two immediately.

>"Mr. Donegal, and Miss Kerry, so nice to see you." Donegal and Kerry

were what Patty and Maggie were called when doing business of this sort. Most people knew who Patty really was, but he had enough fear of him to keep him safe. No one knew Maggie's real identity, and Patty intended to keep it that way. Here she was considered his niece.

>"What can I do for you today?"

>Maggie piped up. "Oh, its a small gathering, some intimate friends. We'll need a case a dis an half a case a dis and dis." As she said this she indicated the bottles on the shelves. Wemick noted the vintage and brand.

>"Excellent, excellent. And you Donegal, anything today?"

>"Now dat ye mention it, I do have a few gifts I'd like ta buy. Ye can handle yerself can't ye now love?" Maggie nodded.

>"Here you are miss," Wemick handed her the paper with her order, "Now all you have to do is settle with Bill over there about the, er, bill." Maggie nodded and left him to help Patty.

>At the end of the rows of bottles, there was a small window, much like a ticket window, but it was entirely black. There was a large slit along the bottom, and a bell. Maggie rang the bell and waited. Presently, a small slate board and piece of chalk were passed through the slit. Maggie took the chalk, placed her paper order on the board, and pushed it back under. After a few seconds, the board came back with a figure on it. It was incredibly high for what Maggie had bought. She crossed it out, and wrote what she was willing to pay, and pushed the board back.

>On the other side of the window was Silent Bill. Rumor was that he had once cheated the head of one of the crime rings on an order, charged them too much for watered down wine and brandy. As a punishment, they had found Bill, and cut out his tongue. But since Bill still had the connections to get the best alcohol, they let him keep his shop, even hiding it and bringing him exclusive business. They were the ones who paid for Wemick to be a front man. But Bill was still a cheapskate, and he drove a tough bargain for his wares.

>The other rumor was that Bill's face was disfigured when police tried to interrogate him about his customers. That was why the window had been painted black, but he always seemed to know who was on the other side anyway.

>Finally, Maggie wrote down another price, and underlined it, meaning she was pulling her order soon if they didn't agree. The slate came back, the number circled. Maggie put the money on the slate. It came back to her with two tags with numbers on them, the numbers of the crates her order was in. Written on the slate was, "Nice doing business with you again Maggie."

>Maggie smiled, wrote a little note back, and took her tags. She got Patty's attention, and they walked toward the back exit. They came out on the waterfront, and at the bottom of the stairs Maggie handed her tags to a rather large brutish man. He nodded, disappeared inside, and came back, handing her two small crates.

>"Ugh," she groaned picking them up. "Patty, yer givin me a ride, I can't carry dese all day way back."

>Patty looked a little uncomfortable. "I can't exactly go into Brooklyn fer a while lass."

>"Patty you didn't!"

>"Keep yer voice down! I can get ye as far as de bridge, but yer carryin from der."

>Maggie sighed and nodded, it wasn't too far.

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>Patty, true to his word, got them a cab as far as the bridge, then

promptly disappeared after giving Maggie a kiss and dropping her on the Brooklyn side. That put Maggie right in Brooklyn Heights, so it wasn't that far a walk.

>Or it wouldn't have been if she hadn't been stopped.

>"And just what is dat youse smugglin into heah?" Maggie kept walking past the finger docks where the voice came from. Before she knew where he came from, a thin boy in pink suspenders was in front of her, blocking her way.

>"I said, whats in deah?" He emphasized his words by rapping sharply on the crates with his cane.

>"Keep yer bloody stick off me property! An get outta me way!"

>Spot showed no sign of moving. "Are ye daft? I said get outta me way, ye got no cause ta stop me."

>"Oh yes I do. You'se is in my territory. An any kid bringing liquor into my territory gots ta pay da toll. So come on, pay up."

>Maggie was slightly puzzled how he knew what was in the crates, but she had no intention of giving him her loot. "Over my dead body."

Spot raised his eyebrow, Maggie spit in his face.

>Spots face grew red in anger. Maggie slowly lowered the cases to the ground.

>"Dat," Spot growld as he wiped his face, "was a very big mistake. Now, I'se not in da habit a hittin young dewdrops like yerself but-"

>"Well, allow me ta make it easier for ya ye Yankee bastard." With that Maggie slapped Spot open palm across the face. He looked like a stunned fish. He made to swing at Maggie, but she wasn't there, instead he felt his legs buckle as she swiped under him with her leg. He scrambled to his feet, but again she wasn't there. He didn't turn around, but heard her footsteps and made a grab for her as she ran up behind him, but instead of sending her sprawling, she tucked into a roll and sprang up laughing.

>Spot grinned, this was becoming fun. He made to punch her in the stomach, but she sidestepped and grabbed his arm, whirling him around and sending him flying towards a pile of empty crates. He ducked into a roll and sprang up rather than hitting them, and made a rush for her. She had lost him in the dark and he caught her by behind, but she reversed the hold and had him in a feeble headlock. He reversed it on her just as somewhere the clock struck seven.

>"Shite! I'm gonna be late, sorry-" With that she kneed him in the groin and laid a well delivered right cross to his right eye. Then she grabbed her coat and the crates and raced off, as fast as anyone could with that much to carry.

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>"Get up! Get up! Time ta sell the papes get outta bed!" Kloppman dodged as a pillow flew across the room full force. It sailed past his head and down the stairs, hitting Race as he, groggy eyed and half awake, was shuffling into the washroom.

>"Hey! Leave me outta dis!" He chuckled the pillow back at Kloppman who chuckled. He tossed the pillow across the room onto the top bunk.

>"Good Mornin to you too Maggie." Smiling to himself, he walked back downstairs.

>"Dis, is an ungodly hour of da mornin ta be wakin up." Maggie swung her legs over the bunk and hopped down to the floor.

>Emma, who was a big morning person, sailed by her. "It wouldn't be so hard on you if ye hadn't been out till midnight Maggie." Maggie glared at her as she pulled on her pants and searched for her

vest.

>"It wasn't as if I was out galavantin around da city, I was werkin!" She stomped after Emma down the stairs, shouting to be heard over the din of the boys getting ready.

>"So you were, but couldn't you persuade Douglas to let you go earlier? Why do you need to stay so long?"

>Maggie couldn't answer her because she had plunged her face into a sink of cold water. She snatched a towel from Racetrack and quickly dried off, speaking as she did so. "Emma, darlin, I love ya, but ye need ta get out more. Tings don't really get goin der until ten o'clock. An the good tips don't come in till the tables with da largest tabs leave, and dey stay the latest. I'm not leavin me tables fer Colin an Marcus to collect from!"

>Through all of this, Emma's head had been under water. She lifted it up during Maggie's last sentence, "What are you talking about?"

>Maggie muttered a curse, lifted her eyes and her hands to the ceiling, and stomped out of the room. "Abba help me I've got her praying again!" Emma moaned as she followed Maggie out of the room, down the stairs, and out onto Duane Street.

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>Maggie and Lacey moved down 9th avenue towards 48th street, each on a separate side of the street.

>"Read all about it! Mass grave discovered in Crown Heights! Police involvement suspected in da murders! Tank ye sir, tank ye 'mam, tank ye sir, 'mam." Maggie smiled at the pennies in her pockets. That article about a rats nest being fumigated under the police station had been helping her all day.

>She nodded as Lacey moved a little further down the street. Maggie stayed on her corner. Or at least, she was planning on doing that when an arm reached out and pulled her into an alley.

>Maggie struggled against her unseen captor, biting and clawing. She managed to get a good knee in to the groin, and was abruptly released.

>"Bloody hell girl! What did ya do dat fer?"

>Maggie turned and looked back. A ray of light filtering through the laundry above hit upon the face of a boy of about 20, of slight build, but tall, with fiery red hair. She stared at him, not believing what she was seeing.

>"Aiden?" She whispered, not trusting her eyes. "Aiden, is dat really you?"

>The boy looked up, still clutching his stomach, revealing light blue eyes. He smiled. "Well, if I had any doubts about who you were, yer greeting sure put dem ta rest. It's me Maggie."

>Maggie squealed, and launched herself into Aiden's arms. He caught her, chuckling deep in his throat, then picking her up in a hug so strong she thought her ribs would crack, but she didn't care.

>Aiden Murphy had been a friend of Maggie's since childhood. His family, like her mother's, had come from the Aran islands, a part of Ireland very set in tradition. Aiden and his father had left Doolin with Maggie's family to find work, and the two had never parted until the O'Rourke's left for America following the death of Maggie's mother. They'd been as close as brother and sister, and leaving Aiden had been one of the most painful parts of leaving home for Maggie. She couldn't believe he was here, and she told him so.

>"I never expected ta foind you, I admit. But den I herd dis voice in da street yesterday, and I knew. I knew dat was my Maggie. I couldn't foind ya den, but I waited all day today hopin you'de be back."

>Maggie pulled away from her friend, not daring to believe he was really there. "I can't believe it, its jest not possible. How on earth did ya get yer da ta leave? An yer mother? Lord! Dey must be shakin der fingers back on da islands, two families lost ta da sin an curuption of da cursed new world!" She laughed, but Aiden only managed a forced smile. Maggie's face fell, she became concerned.

>"Aiden?...Everytin's all right, isn't it?" Aiden looked away for a minute, but when he turned back she could see his face full of pain, she knew that look, she'd worn it herself.

>"No..." she shook her head, not wanting to hear this.

>Aiden nodded. "He died two winters ago Maggie. Yer right, der wasn't a power on earth dat coulda got him off dat island. An it killed him-" He broke off, and Maggie wrapped her arms around him. She sat down on a box in the alley, Aiden's head in her lap.

>"It's all right, I know, I know what its like, believe me..." She sort of rocked him there for a moment, and he recovered himself and sat up on the box with her.

>"I don't know how I can say dat in front of you. You lost yer whole family in less den a year. You were da only one left on yer own in a country full a strangers..."

>Maggie shook her head. "It doesn't make losin a parent any easier no matter where ye are....Where's yer ma? An da twins? Are dey-"

>
"Oh, der fine, tank da Lord. After da died, ma left Dublin fer the islands, she took Sean and Marie with her. I stayed ta work."

>
"Ya shouldn't have isolated yerself Aiden."

>
"An what should I ha done, gone back ta da Arans? Ye know dat place too well Maggie, modern thinkin has no place in it. I wasn't goin back ta be told dat everytin I believed in was wrong jest because it was different!"

>
Maggie nodded, she had grown up around the isles where her grandparents lived, they were steeped in tradition; her grandmother refused to speak English, on principle.

>
They sat in silence a moment, then Maggie tried to clear the air. "So how long have ye been 'ere? An how did ye know what part a da city I was in?"

>
Aiden paused, and avoided eye contact with Maggie. "I uh, I been here about two months."

>
"Two months! What took ye so long?"

>
"It's complicated Maggie. I had certen obligations ta fill...."

>
Maggie stared at Aiden, hard. This wasn't sounding good. "What kind a obligations, an ye still haven't told me how ye found me where-a-bouts."

>
"Well Patty said-"

>
"Patty! Patty O'Brien? What in da name a all dats holy were ya doin around Patty O'Brien?"

>
Aiden started at her excitement, but he had a guilty look on his face, he was hiding something and Maggie knew it. "Nothin girl! I jest sorta bumped inta him when I got here an-"

>
"Harse shite."

>
"What?"

>
Maggie was standing up now, staring the sitting Aiden right in the eye, hands on her hips, eyes wild. "Dat's harse shite Aiden an you know it. No one, no one jest 'bumps in' ta Patty O'Brien. He makes sure a dat. Jesus, Aiden do ye know what kinda werk dat man is inta-" She stopped, and stared at Aiden long and hard, a shadow of

sudden realization crossing over her face. She backed up from him slowly, shaking her head.

>
"Aiden, Aiden tell me ya don't know anytin about da kind a business Patty's in. Jest tell me dat an we'll ferget all dis. Tell me, please." Her voice had grown very soft, pleading. But Aiden wouldn't meet her eyes. Maggie's face darkened, "Jesus Mary an Joseph," she breathed. Then she exploded.

>
"Jesus! Aiden how could ya be so stupid! What da hell are ya doin in dat line a werk! Do ye want ta get yerself killed? Want yer ma ta lose all da men in her family? Want me ta lose da best feckin friend I ever had right after I found him again? What da hell are ye doin?" Now Aiden was starting to get angry.

>
'What do you know Maggie? Huh? Ye been livin here fer almost seven feckin years. You never had ta scrape a livin outta da streets a Dublin. I couldn't support meself let alone me ma on werkin in da factory. I was shinin shoes before-

>
"What do I know? What do I know?" Maggie's voice grew louder with every word. "What do ye tink happened ta me when me da died Aiden? Ye tink I was taken in? I was kicked outta me house, an me tings were eider stolen or sold. I had a roof over me head fer tree years because a some kind nuns! An den what happened? It burned Aiden! Da whole feckin place burned ta da ground. I lived on da street fer four years! I scraped a livin together by sleepin on da streets with four other girls. An we had a child ta take care of besides. An dats not feckin easy ta do in a city where dey "don't hire Irish". We're a disease ta dem Aiden, a feckin disease. I had ta sell newspapers fer a penny a piece. An den, ya want ta know what happened last winter Aiden, do ya? Da feckin factory burned down! Burned! Ta da ground! We lived in a boxcar in da middle of winter, I almost died from bloody pneumonia, an ye tink I never had ta scrape a livin together? Jesus Aiden, I had it every bit as tough as you. I won't show you me scars where I been beaten. But I never had ta turn ta da bloody mafia ta make ends meet."

>
Aiden just stared at her for a long time. Maggie stared back breathing heavily, waiting for him to respond.

>
"I'm sorry Maggie. I never knew it was dat bad, I jest assumed-

>
"Don't assume anytin in dis city Aiden. Dats how people get hurt." Aiden nodded. Maggie looked at him, relented, and wrapped her arms around his waist. They stayed that way for a long time, then Maggie pulled him out into the sunlight of the street.

>
"Come on, I'll take yata Tibby's, ye can get a good meal. Not Irish fare a course, but decent."

>
Aiden looked uncomfortable. "I don't tink dats sech a good idea Maggie." Maggie looked puzzled, "Why?"

>
Aiden finally spit it out. "Dey keep kinda a tight eye on us ya know. If ye took me ta where ye spend a lot a time, dey'll follow."

>
Maggie's eyes darted around. "Whose 'dey' Aiden?"

>
He had to tell her, "Flynn's goons."

>
Maggie's eyes opened wide in fear, and her voice shook, "Ya mean Mickey Flynn's goons? Why would dey be here, Mickey runs outta Dublin an Belfast."

>
Aiden shook his head, "Not anymore."

>
"Ye mean he's here?"

>
Aiden nodded, "Dats how I came over ya see, I was part a da group he brought."

>
Maggie sucked in her breath. "Aiden ye have ta get out. Ye can't be werkin fer him."

>
"Don't ya tink I've tried Maggie? I'm gonna talk with Patty, I

tink he can help. But till den I'm gonna have ta lay low an do as I'm told. I don't want ye mixed up in dis."

>
Maggie looked over Aiden's shoulder, "Jesus Aiden I already am."

>
"What?"

>
"Dat man, behind you. I know who he is, an he's one of Mickey's, ye've been followed. An he's seen me."

>
"Jesus Maggie, I didn't tink dey'de find me so fast. I never ment ta get ye in danger."

>
Maggie kept her eyes on the man and put a finger to Aiden's lips. "Hush now, I can take care a meself, I had practice dodgin da's creditors. Ye jest be sure ta go home by yer normal route, nothin out a de ordinary. I'll go somewhere else an hide fer a few hours. I'll be fine."

>
Aiden nodded. "How will I find you?"

>
"Use Patty, he's better at dis den you are."

>
"Hey!"

>
"Well, it's true!" She laughed and kissed him on the cheek, then slipped into the alley and disappeared from sight.

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>Maggie walked fast, and in circles for the better part of a half hour, but whenever she looked over her shoulder, she saw one of Mickey's hired hands. Their brutality was notorious, rumor was Mickey helped them escape from prison, and they'll be sent back or killed if they don't complete their job to satisfaction.

>All the more reason for Maggie to walk quickly.

>One thing was for certain, she couldn't go back to Duane Street, not tonight. There was no way she was going to lead Mickey's nose toward the Lodging House. She knew what the man could do. Her father had gambled his life away in Dublin taverns after her mother's death. He had been so crushed he didn't care when he ended up owing money to the underground. But they didn't come after Charlie O'Rourke, they came after his children. They would follow Maggie and her two little brothers, Sean and Daniel, all over the city, scaring them. Sometimes more. Maggie had a scar across her right arm from the time the thugs had used a knife to persuade them to force their father to pay up.

>Yes, if it was one thing all that had taught her, it was that you didn't let those people anywhere near the ones you loved. And Maggie didn't intend to.

>Maggie's wandering had taken her to the far east side of the island. What the hell, she thought, staring across the river, it's just as easy to get lost in Brooklyn as in Manhattan, and it's farther from home. She set out across the bridge.

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>"Well, well what do we have- you!"

>Maggie's head whipped around, the voice, it was familiar...She glanced back over her shoulder, her shadow was still there, a little closer.

>"Hey, you deah! Come 'ere, we ain't finished!"

>Maggie didn't have time for this. A fight would be an easy way for the thug to overtake her, and a scuffle with this boy might pull him into the whole mess. She had only one option left, and her pride screamed as she decided she had to take it

>She ran; as fast and as hard as she could. She shot past Spot, although not in time to miss his stick clipping her across the shins, she kept going. Spot followed her, idiot, but there was nothing that could be done. She glanced back, and saw her tail sprinting through

the crowd. He had longer legs, and was going to overtake her in a matter of moments. She ducked away from the river into an alley, kicking trash cans over behind her to block the pursuit. She burst out into the street, ran a block, and darted back down another alley, back towards the water. If she could hop onto a boat, or lose him in the bridge traffic... *BAM* She slammed into someone. She pushed herself off to keep on going, but the someone wasn't letting go. She looked up, damn. It was the pink suspended boy from the other night. She really didn't need this. She fought against his grasp, but he was strong. Maggie was used to that though, and Patty had taught her how to slip out of the flimsy hold he had on her. But no sooner had she broke free than another boy stood in her way, and another. About five of them in all, and clearly none was interested in letting her go.

>Maggie looked beyond them, where was the shadow? She couldn't find him. Either he had become a better hider, or she had lost him. For now. And if she stayed out here in the open, he was just going to find her. She had to get out of sight. She turned back to the boy.

>"All right, you win. But if ya intend ta do anytin udder den let me go, can we please go somewhere a little more private please? Fer reasons a mine own, I don't really want ta be seen right now."

>Spot stared at her. Something was strange. This was the same girl who had laughed out loud during the fight last night, but now, when she was barely being touched..what was it? Then he realized: she was afraid, really afraid. What was the girl so terrified of? And why was she darting her gaze around like that? Whatever the cause, she was skittish as a racehorse right now, he'd never get anything out of her.

>He stared at her, hard. "If I take youse somewheres hidden, an I let all dese boys go, I need your solemn woid dat you won't run." Maggie nodded, spit on her hand, and held it out. Spot sealed the spitshake, nodded to the boys to depart, and with a hand firmly on Maggie's arm, pulled her towards a tenement building, up the fire escape, to the roof.

>"Dis is de most private I can do." Maggie looked around warily, then, satisfied, she turned to Spot.

>"All right. If ye want ta threaten or fight or whatever its fine, jest as long as we do it here."

>Spot couldn't figure it out. This girl was bizarre, but he knew he didn't want to fight, although that had been kinda fun last night. He just wanted to find out who she was, and what she was doing sneaking around his docks.

>Spot stuck out his hand, "Spot, Spot Conlon, greatest most powerful newsie in New Yawk." Maggie grinned, amused at Spots modest opinion of himself. She shook his hand, "Maggie, Maggie O'Rourke, newsie and rum runner fer O'Connor's pub. Its a pleasure, really."

>Now it was Spot's turn to grin. "Wait a sec, youse," he looked her up and down, "youse is a newsie?"

>Maggie just nodded, "Dats right, live in da Duane Street house in Manhattan."

>"Well dat explains it, only Jacky-boy coulda-" The look she was giving him made Spot a tad uncomfortable, so he stopped before he said something he would regret. It only lasted a minute, and she was back to staring at people down on the street, trying to find someone. Crazy, he thought, only Jack woulda toined outa newsie like dis.

>"Hey, a I hate ta ask ya dis, but dis is my territory an I gotta know, did ya steal dat alcohol you was bringin in last night?"

>If she'd been closer she would have slapped him in the face, as it was, her face just grew dark and angry, but she held on to her temper, not wanting to attract attention from below.

>"No," she said in a voice that was too soft and controlled, "I didn't steal it. I bought it."

>Spot didn't believe her. "Whats a little thing like you need with two cases a dat stuff, you throwin a party?"

>Maggie clenched her fists, don't make a scene now. "If its any ayer business, which I doubt, I bought it because thats my job. I werk at a pub, an we needed more liquor, so I went an I bought some. Do ye have a problem with dat?"

>Spot gave her a look, "Deys sendin a goil ta buy dem beah? Dat don't sound-"

>"Dey sent me because none of dem have da bargaining skills ta get god prices, or da contacts ta get quality merchandise, an thats all I'm goin ta say on da subject."

>Spot backed off for a minute, but he had more questions. He perched himself on the edge and looked over, den back at Maggie. "So if youse didn't steal anytin, whose you runnin from?"

>"Dats none of yer business an ye wouldn't want ta know anyway."

>Spot hopped off the ledge and moved toward her, "Oh, but it is my business ya see. I got Jacky-boy draggin scum from all over da city, an no doubt da woild, inta my territory. I ain't gonna stand fer dat. I'm da leaduh around here, an its my job ta get all dat pollution outta Brooklyn."

>Now, in his little speech, Spot had meant the "scum" and "pollution" to refer to the thugs that were chasing Maggie. But the "scum form all over the city and the world" part resonated in Maggie's ears. She'd been called that often enough. Her fists clenched tighter, and no matter how she told herself to calm down, all she saw was red. She wasn't going to O'Conner's tonight anyway, not with that shadow still lurking. So why stay, there were plenty of hiding places in Manhattan, just as many as here.

>She advanced slowly, till she was right at the edge of the roof, nose to nose with Spot. "After all of yer kindly hospitality, I'd hate ta inconvenience ya in anyway. So I'll jest take me scummy, polluted arse an get back where I belong. Dats what you want, isn't it? I tot so, thats what you all want. Well ye aren't goin ta get rid o me like a rat, I choose where I go an no one else. Don't bother lookin fer me at da Lodgin' House either, I can't go home, it ain't safe, not here or der. An yer right, dis place is polluted, an full of scum," she stared right at Spot as she said this, "an fer da sakea keepin yer precious territory clean, I'm leavin." And with that, she jumped off the roof.

>She had seen the wagon full of rugs and carpets earlier, and landed right on top of it, with little or no bruises. She leaped off it at a run, never giving Spot a backward glance.

>"Wait!" Spot called, "I didn't mean-" by now she was too far away to hear him. He turned toward the fire escape muttering, "I didn't mean you."

>-----

>"Hey Jackey-boy, we need ta tawk." Jack looked up as Spot came into Tibby's. It was the beginning of the lunch hour and newsies were filtering in. Jack raised his eyebrows and shoved over in the booth, Spot dropped into it. He grabbed a glass of water, not caring whose, and drank it down in one gulp. He finished and turned to Jack and David, who was sitting on the opposite side of the booth.

>"Listen Jack, we gots a woikin relationship, an I tot we coulds all respect dat. So why is you sendin youse newsies inta Brooklyn? I tot we-"

>"Hold on Spot. Wadda ya mean I'm sendin kids inta Brooklyn. I ain't doin dat. All myse newsies stay on Manhattan, like we agreed."

>"Den how comes I gots Manhattan newsies assaultin my shores by night an day?"

>Jack and David looked at each other, confused. "What?"

>"Its very simple Jack. You ain't doin your job. Last night I got in a tumble wiv some goil from Manhattan sneakin two crates a Perelli into my territory, an she won't pay da tax. An dis mornin, I got da same goil slippin over da bridge, wid papes, an ta boot she's got some wacko followin her, so now I gots ta be on me guard fer dose guys too. Can't ye control yer own Jack?"

>David interrupted, "Spot, Jack can't be responsible for what one newsie is doing on their own, at least not when he doesn't even know they're going to Brooklyn. Since when has going to Brooklyn be a crime?"

>Mush's voice floated over from the next booth, "Yeah, its only a crime a bad taste!" Spot threw a salt shaker at him.

>David rolled his eyes and went on. "Spot, did the girl actually sell any papers while she was in Brooklyn?"

>Spot thought for a moment, "Well, no, come ta tink of it, she was too busy runnin from dis big guy. No she didn't sell anytin."

>"Den she wasn't breakin da contract." Jack said. "Ya know newsies enough dat date people in Brooklyn, an deys nevuh had a problem goin over der. I tink youse is just over reactin Spot, have sometin ta eat."

>David looked a little more concerned, he turned to Jack. "Jack, if one of the newsies is running from someone, shouldn't we know who it is so we can help them? Maybe have them sell with someone else, somewhere else." Jack nodded.

>"Spot, can you tell me which one of da goils it was?" He motioned to the news girls sitting in booths and tables around the room.

>Spot shook his head. "She ain't heah Jack. She told me so, sometin about it not bein safe ta go home. Den she ran off, I ain't got a clue where she is."

>Jack looked around the room hard, "David, who'se missin?"

>Just as they began to scan the room, Lacey came in the door. She looked very concerned. She immediately crossed the room to a table with the rest of her friends, Emma, Kats, Gloria, and little Annie. She talked rapidly, using her hands, sometimes slipping into Italian, but the girls all understood, and looked concerned. They got up and spread out, going around to tables, asking questions. The disappointed looks on there faces made it clear they weren't getting the answers they hoped for.

>Lacey came over to the booth next to Jack's, where Mush, Kid Blink, and Racetrack were eating.

>Racetrack piped up as soon as he saw Lacey come over. "So, whats goin on goygeous?" But unlike normally, Lacey wasn't returning Race's flirting.

>"Have any a you seen Maggie today?"

>"I tot she sold wid you?"

>"She did-does, dats just da problem. I was on one side a da street an she was on de other, an the next thing I know she's gone. I looked all over da kitchen, all over da west side an part of mid town,

niente" She snapped her fingers to emphasize the point.

>Spot leaned over the back of the booth and stared at Lacey. "Did you say da goil you was lookin for was named Maggie?"

>"Have you seen her?"

>"Well, I met a Maggie. She was rude, loud, insultin' and a helluva runner. Sound like da right one?"

>Jack leaned into the table, "If this was Maggie we may have more than we bargained for. Dat goil has a bad habit a gettin herself into trouble."

>Lacey sat down in their booth, her large dark eyes focused on Spot. "Ya better tell me da whole story."

>-----

>By the time Spot was done, the rest of Maggie's "family"; Emma, Kats, Gloria, and Annie, had pulled up chairs or crammed into booths to hear. When he finished, they all looked at each other. It was as if they could communicate without speaking. Lacey thanked Spot curtly and they all got up to leave.

>"Wait!" David called, "Where are you going?"

>Gloria called back, "If anyone can find her in this city we can." David slipped out of the booth and joined them.

>"Then I'm coming with you." Emma shrugged, "As long as you can keep up." And with that they all exited Tibby's and took off down the street.

>-----

>It was late, very late. They had stopped by the Lodging House a few hours ago to drop off Annie, who had been falling asleep on her feet. Spot had left for Brooklyn with orders to tell them immediately if he saw Maggie, and he went off muttering about being a slave to Jack.

>They had searched every place imaginable with no luck. They decided to split up about half an hour ago, and David was on his own. He found himself on the Lower East side, near the docks, and decided to check one last place before he went home.

>The boxcar was still there, oddly enough. He figured it would have been torn off the tracks by now. He tried the door, it was shut tight. He almost gave it up and went home, but he noticed a bucket of fresh water by the door. Some one was inside. He knocked on the door, but received no answer. He kept trying to pull it open, but the door was stuck fast.

>"I tink it must ha rusted shut. Dats why I had ta sleep on da roof." He jerked his head up to see Maggie peering back at him over the edge. "What can I do fer ya dis evenin David?"

>"Why didn't you come back to the House? The girls have been looking all over for you."

>Concern crept over Maggie's face. "I wanted ta leave ward, but I couldn't risk comin back ta da house so soon. Tell dem not ta worry, I'll be fine. I'll see 'em tomorrow mornin."

>David stared up at her, straining to see her in the faint light. "Maggie, what's going on? Spot said someone was chasing you in Brooklyn today." There was a pause.

>"So ye met dat arrogant little bastard did ya?" David smiled, it wasn't the first time someone had said that about Spot.

>"Actually, I've know him quite awhile, and your description isn't all that inaccurate. But you didn't answer my question."

>Another pause, "David, I'll be all right tanite, I promise. If ya still need ta know tomorrow I'll tell ya, but right know I'm tired an

I want ta go ta sleep."

>David thought a moment, then took off his coat and threw it up to her. "What's dis?"

>"My coat, you'll be a lot more comfortable tonight if you have it."

>"I don't want your charity David, I'm fine-"

>"Think of it as insurance. If you have my coat, then you have to come back and return it soon." He heard her chuckle.

>"Never made you out ta be a swindler David Jacobs. I'll see ya in de mornin, I promise. Don't ferget ta let dem know at da Lodgin House dat I'm all right."

>David promised and turned to walk back home.

>-----

>True to her word, Maggie was back at the distribution center early the next morning. She was met with anxious looks and hugs from her friends, but she never really told anyone what had happened. What she did tell them was that she needed to sell alone today.

>"Like hell you is." She turned over her shoulder to see Jack standing over her.

>"I'll sell wid who I please Jack, an taday I have ta sell by meself."

>"You had da whole house woiked up ovah wheah you was last night, an youse is responsible fer gettin Spot Conlon on me case as well- By da way, what is dis about you pickin a fight wid him?- In any case, da least youse can do is give us some piece a mind, let one a da guys sell wid ya."

>"First of all, he picked a fight wid me, an he's jest sore because he lost. Second, if I could ha got ward to ya I would hav, but I couldn't. An tird, dis is bigger den anytin you've dealt wid Jack. Dis concerns people from a part a dis city ya don't know anytin about. Ye'de jest put me in danger, any a ya would."

>She looked around at the faces gathered about. Jack look like a landed fish, most of the boys just looked confused, but Emma was nodding. She understood sometimes where Maggie went, she couldn't follow. It was the same with Lacey when she was calling on her 'other family', sometimes you had to do things on your own.

>David picked that moment to run up. "Hey Jack! Maggie I-" he stopped seeing the blank stares and noting the silence.

>"Here's yer jacket David, tanks." Maggie took the moment to toss David coat, which he caught numbly, and push through the crowd and down the street.

>"Where's she going?"

>-----

>David ran down the street after Maggie, and quickly fell into step with her. She turned to him, 'An jest what in de warld do ya tink yer doin?'

>David shrugged, but he wasn't smiling. "Well, Jack just stormed off cursing, none of the girls will talk like, its there under some kind of oath, and no one else has a clue whats going on. So if I'm going to find it out, it'll have to be from you. And your going to tell me."

>Maggie stared at him, "I don't have ta tell ya anytin."

>David's face was cold. "You're right, you don't. But do I have to remind you that there is a whole house full of people back there that care about you? That Annie didn't sleep last night because she was afraid you'de been put in another factory and weren't coming back? That Race and Mush didn't come home till dawn, and this time they weren't out at the track or the poker hall. They were out looking for

you. Because your one of us. Whether you like it or not when you join us you're part of a family, and we look out for each other. Right now I ought to be selling papers, but I am trotting after you, because all we can figure out is that you are in some sort of trouble, but you won't turn to us for help. If you really have to take care of this on your own and you know you can, fine. Go ahead! Do it! But give them the consideration of letting them know whats going on. Because you have people that worry when you don't come home at night. And you have people that'll be crushed if you don't come home again. So think about that, all right?"

>With that, David stopped and turned around. Maggie stopped and stared after him. If ye could only understand David. I have ta do dis because I do care. Dis is de only way I can keep all of ye safe. I'm sorry.

>-----

>Maggie took her papers down to the Lower East side that day to sell. She decided staying a good distance from the Kitchen was a smart plan. She had sold a bunch to ferry goers and tourists, and was done a little after lunch. Seeing as Tibby's was out of the question, she decided to head over to O'Connors and start the afternoon shift.

>She crossed the bridge cautiously, watching both behind her, for any tails, and in front, in case that bastard of a newsie Spot decided to show his ugly face. Fortunately she managed to cross without any problems, but she took a long route to O'Conner's, just in case she was followed.

>She had never been to O'Connor's in the afternoon before, and the place was altogether too clean. The tables hadn't yet been pushed back for dancing and fighting, there wasn't any sawdust down yet, and the bar was sparkling. It was a completely different atmosphere.

>"Maggie! Maggie my love! Come 'ere won't ya. Jest sit on me lap a bit, show us why we were all mad ta leave Ireland behind."

>Maggie grinned at the cat calls, but the same clientele. Glancing at the old men in the corner table, Maggie wondered if they ever went home. She smiled and went into the back room, where Douglas was puzzling over the account books. He was startled to hear someone enter the room, but relaxed when he realized it was Maggie.

>"Jesus, I thought ye were Bernadette. Sweet Bridgett, I love da woman, but she'll be tha deah o me yet jest ye wait!" He paused, scratching his beard, "What are ya doin here so early girl? Yer shift don't start till-"

>"I know Douglas. Did anyone, by chance, come in here lookin fer me today?"

>Douglas looked thoughtful and rubbed his beard. "Come ta tink of it, a tall gentleman, wid a dark coat an peculiar manner came in bout an hour ago askin fer ya. Told him ye wouldn't be in till later, an would he care ta leave a note."

>"Well, did he?"

>"No, he did talk wit Colin a bit do, better ta ask him."

>He hadn't finished his sentence before Maggie was out the door and into the kitchen

>-----

>Maggie found Colin peeling potatoes in the back near the fire. She sat down on the hearth next to him, grabbing a knife and a spud and began to work "Colin, did anyone ask fer me today?"

>Colin, a tall, lanky boy with dark hair and green eyes looked at her uncharacteristic seriousness. "Aye, Patty came lookin fer ya around

noon."

>Maggie's head shot up, an she nearly cut herself with the knife in her surprise. "Watch yerself!" Colin warned. Maggie nodded and went back to work.

>"So," she tried to keep the tone light, "jest what did he have ta say fer himself?"

>Colin looked around for a moment and lowered his voice, "He wanted ta talk wit ya about somebody named Aiden. Said dat he's sorry about dat, an not ta worry, he'd take care a everytin."

>Maggie didn't relax, "When Patty takes care o tings, people get hert. I jest hope dey both use der heads." Colin sighed and peeled his potato, "especially since Patty don't have much o one in da first place." That made Maggie smile, and for the rest of the afternoon they sat peeling and telling jokes, until Marcus came in to say that drinks needed to be served and that Maggie had a visitor.

>
Maggie hadn't realized that so much time had passed. It was dark outside and the main room was filling up when she came out of the kitchen. It was so full she couldn't even see the door. And getting to it took some time since every table between the back of the room and the front had to stop her to greet her and order their drinks. She broke free breathless, slamming a pad full of drink orders onto the bar in front of Douglas, that was when she saw David.

>
A puzzled smile came over her face as she waved to him and he came over. She gave him a hug and then hoped backwards onto the bar. "I don't meanta be rude David, but what are ye doin here?"

>
David grinned and ran his hand through his hair. "Well, not to put too fine a point on things, Jack wanted someone to keep an eye on you. And Lacey said that you'd most likely be here."

>
Maggie made to protest, "I can take-" David cut her off

>
"Care of yourself thank you very much. I know, I know. Don't get all defensive." he grinned devilishly and leaned against the bar, "Actually, we were more worried you might hurt somebody, or burn down a building. You have a nasty habit of doing that when you get mad you know." Maggie made a face and threw a dish towel at him. "See? See? You've got one hell of a temper there, and mighty vicious too!"

>
"You have no idea." Maggie turned to scowl at the new voice. Douglas was standing behind her, an unopened bottle of gin in his hand. "Why don'tcha intraduce me ta yer friend Half Pint?"

>
Maggie grinned. "Douglas, dis is David Jacobs, he sells newspapers in Manhattan. David, dis is Douglas O'Connor, owner and manager of dis fine establishment."

>
Douglas held out his massive paw, "Any friend a Maggie's is a friend a mine. Welcome ta O'Connor's lad." David smiled, a bit taken aback by the large man, and shook his hand, "Pleased to meet you sir."

>
Douglas nodded, and turned to Maggie, holding out the bottle. "As much as I love ye lass, we got patrons ta serve and Colin won't be out ta help till Marcus comes back from buying da beer, so you have a full room ta werk." Maggie nodded, and turned apologetically to David.

>
"I'm afraid he's right. Will ye be all right here if I go and take care a tings?" She inclined her head toward the crowded room. David nodded, and at that moment, Douglas leaned over Maggie's shoulder.

>
"Ya know girl, if yer friend ain't doin anytin, we could always

use a pair 'o hands in da kitchen." Maggie swatted him with the dish towel.

>
"Ye keep yer mouth shut, he ain't here ta work for you!" She grinned mischievously, "If ye really need the help I could run upstairs an call Bernadette..."

>
"Bite you tongue girl! Fine, fine, I jest tot it might keep the boy from gettin bored."

>
"You thought it would be a quick way to get some cheep labor, admit it!"

>
At this point David butted in, "If you need the help I wouldn't mind-"

>
"There ya see? I told you he wouldn't mind!" Maggie shot Douglas a look, and he retreated to the other end of the bar, grinning and chuckling to himself.

>
Maggie turned back to David, "ye don't have ta, but if ye want da kitchen's back der. Colin's in der an he probably could use a hand dryin da dishes."

>
David shrugged, "I don't mind. Beats sitting here lookin like a bodyguard." Maggie smiled, of all the newsies, David was the last one she'd expect to be a bodyguard. She led David into the kitchen and introduced him to Colin. The two were laughing and joking when the door shut behind her.

>

>
"So, how long have you know Maggie?" Colin was up to his elbows in wash water, scrubbing while David dried. David finished wiping the last glass and reach for another.

>
"Not all that long. She and her friends turned up at out distribution center a couple of months ago, just after Christmas."

>
Colin nodded, and smiled as he said, "So what do ye think of her?"

>
David shrugged, "To tell the truth, don't know her very well. See, I live at home, not at the Lodging House, so I don't see her as often as the others. And since she's always working here, I don't see her much at Tibby's either."

>
Colin nodded, "I know what ya ,mean, dat girl doesn't leave much time fer lazin about. I can hardly get her ta take a shift off, she's hell bent on saving enough money to bring whats left of her family here. If it weren't fer dancin she'd work herself from dawn till dusk."

>
David cast a strange look at Colin, "Dancing? Maggie....dances?" It just didn't seem to fit, but Colin nodded enthusiastically.

>
"She and I have a sort of runnin competition as ta who's the best. But ya have to remember, Maggie spent most of her childhood sittin around in pubs, keeping an eye on her da. She learned all sorts a things in der, an one of em was how ta dance, and dance well. She's the reigning champ around here, an we have a competition every couple a months for Irish from all over New Yark. Anyways, all ya have ta do is get da band ta play one of her favorites or a real fast jig or a reel and she's gone. Only t'ing I know of dat Maggie enjoys more den cursin' is dat." Colin smiled, "Dat was actually part 'a da' reason dat-"

>
Colin was cut off by the sound of a table crashing to the floor and glasses shattering. "Jesus Mary an Joseph! Ye would 'tink de'yed wait a couple a hours before goin' at it!" With this ripped off his apron, wiping his hand on the back of his pants as he burst out through the swinging kitchen doors, a bewildered David right behind him.

>
In the middle of the room a table had been knocked over and

chairs were strewn everywhere. In the middle of the rucus two men were rolling on the floor trying to hit each other. They were easily as big as Douglas, and the man himself was trying to separate them. Colin ran into the thick of it to assist him, but it wasn't much use. David saw Maggie standing to one side shaking her head, her arms crossed in front of her chest. Then, raising her hands to the sky she walked over to the stairs and shouted something. Moments later a wiry woman with jet black hair pulled back in a tight bun with a few wisps of white came down the stairs. Maggie pointed to the rucus and the two of them strode up to the fight with dark, glacial expressions on their faces. Neither were very tall, so Maggie stood on one table and the woman stepped up on the chair next to her. They looked at each other, and Maggie made a half bow, motioning with her arms for the woman to go first. The woman nodded in acknowledgment, and turned back to the fight. No one had noticed her presence.

>
Yet. "I HAVE HAD ENOUGH!" It did not seem possible that such a huge sound that filled the entire room, carrying over the din of the brawl, could come from such a little woman. The men, all of them, froze.

>
The woman began again. "As if it ain't bad enough on me poor weary soul dat I 'have ta live with da thot' dat my husband owns a pub. Dat I have ta listen to da god awful rantin' an ravin' from dawn till dusk. But Lord, ye don't seem ta 'tink dat's enough punishment for me sins, so ye send me dese boys. Dese foolish rowdy godless souls dat tear me 'home apart? What have I done Lord? What have I done ta deserve dis? Why...." The woman buried her head in her hands, winking and nodding to Maggie to continue.

>
Maggie stared in utter disgust and disapproval at the two men at her feet. She just stared at them for a moment, then said ever so softly, "Shamus...Dermot...what do ye have ta say fer yourselves? Eh? Look at what you've done to dis poor woman, look" She pointed at the woman who still held her head in her hands, occasionally lifting it to talk to pray to the ceiling. "What has Bernadette ever done ta either a you? She's cooked yer meals an served yer gin? An 'how many 'tings has she agreed not ta tell yer wives? Hmm? Shamus, do ye really want Mary ta know about da time yer were so drunk ye went into da Haggerty's house an fell asleep in da kitchen? An Dermot, how do ya 'tink Karen will react when she heard yer not always at Saturday evenin' mass, but here instead? Bernadette has done so much fer both a ya, an look how ye treat her. Oh ye should be ashamed, ashamed, ashamed. Satan is heatin his pokers for ye, ya heartless bastards!

>
A this point both Dermot and Shamus were very worried

>
"Aw Maggie, we meant no harm, honest. Please don't tell Mary, I promise it won't happen again."

>
"Ye know we'd never do anytin' ta hurt ya on purpose Bernadette, please don't mention dis ta Karen!"

>
A small smile crept over Maggie's face. "Very well, yer forgiven. But yer gonna sweep an mop and clean up dis mess, I'm not gonna get stuck here at another horrible hour because a your shenanigans. Now apologize ta Bernadette an get on wid it."

>
The men quickly rose to their feet and practically groveled in front of Bernadette, who was doing a fine job dredging up tears. Then Maggie helped her off the table and pretended to support the distraught woman as far as the stairs. They passed Douglas, who gave his wife a kiss and a knowing smile, and the two could barely reach the stairs before they burst into laughter.

>
Colin was laughing so hard there were tears coming out of his eyes, he stumbled backward against the wall next the David, bent

over. "Look at 'em! Dey don't have da combined body weight a one a dose two an still dey put da fear a god in 'em! It gets me every time!"

>
David looked at him, incredulous, "You mean they do this all the time?"

>
That sent Colin into another fit. He managed to speak after a few seconds, still chuckling and wiping tears out of his eyes, "Are ye kiddin? Douglas hired her cause she had a mouth like a sewer an wouldn't think twice about shootin' it off to the customers! Its saved me an him a couple thousand black eyes!"

>
David couldn't help but grin, especially watching Maggie standing over the men making sure they cleaned up, like a queen, except for when she was throwing drinks in peoples faces and wiping up the bar.

>
They had just finished righting the room when the door burst open and Patty rushed into the room. Maggie dropped her dishtowel and ran over to where he stopped, out of breath, leaning against the doorframe. He took her aside and talked to her in a low voice. Neither Colin or David could make out what was said, but it wasn't more than a minute before Maggies eyes flew open wide in alarm. She hopped over the bar, grabbed her coat, and was out the door at such speed Patty could barely follow her. David made to go after her, but both Douglas and Colin grabbed him.

>
"Ye can't do anytin' ta help lad. Where Patty's takin her its likely only she an Patty will get through. We've all tried ta help. But now I'm afraid all we can do is wait." David looked up at Douglas to protest, but he saw the frustration and concern that was in his eyes mirrored in those of Colin and Douglas. Indeed, everyone in the room looked a bit uneasy. If none of them could help her, it was unlikely that he would; and especially not in Brooklyn.

>

>
"What do ye mean he took yer bleedin' advice? What did ye tell him?" Maggie barely looked back at Patty as she ran along the side streets and back allies of East New York, not far from Canarsie.

>
Patty was panting, and used a faint gesture to their right to indicate to Maggie which way to go. "Jesus Maggie I don't know..I didn't tink he was gonna do dis. I thought he was tryin ta work his way up I never thought he'd try ta pull out so quick. I told him who I went to when I wanted outta Mickey's business. An he jest took off, didn't listen. Fer Christ's sake Maggie, I had to beat the life outta the Wringer ta get me freedom, an he dished out almost as much as he took. If Aiden isn't tinkin straight-"

>
"He's never tinkin straight. And he's gotten worse since he realized he pulled me into it, he wanted out as fast as he could. Damnit! Why did he have ta have sucha think skull?"

>
"He's a Murphy, his father was exactly the same way, god rest his soul."

>
"Well his son's goin ta end up jest like him if we don't-" Patty clamped his hand over her mouth. He pointed across the street to an abandoned factory, dingy and green with chipped and rusted paint.

>
"We're here, dats where he went in, or so de old boy network told me." Maggie nodded.

>
"Ye stay here Patty."

>
"Are ye outta yer bloody mind? What can you do in der?"

>
"I can slip in trew da windows easier den you can, an if anyone has ta come to da rescue, I'd rather have it be you rescuin me den de

other way around." Patty nodded.

>
He pointed to a door down the ally. "Dats da back room, if he's not be'in questioned in the main room dey'de trow him in der. Careful now girl." Maggie gave his hand a squeeze and crept across the street and into the ally.

>

>
The ally was dark, and the light from the streetlamp barely illuminated the dingy gray door. There was a window just above her head, wide enough for her to squeeze through. She carefully balanced on top of two empty crates stacked on top of each other. She lifted the window open and threw her leg over the sill, then another, then slid through, dropping softly to the floor in a crouch.

>
There was light filtering through the crack underneath another door on the opposite wall. It didn't provide much, but that and the light from the window cast vague shadows of objects. Maggie sucked in her breath as she recognized an object by the door, Aiden.

>
She crept over to him, "Aiden?...Aiden? Wake up Aiden, please!" She shook him gently, he started to shout but she covered his mouth with her hand. "It's Maggie Aiden, hush!"

>
"Maggie?...What are ye doin here?" Aiden sat up stiffly and rubbed his head, Maggie couldn't tell what had happened but his head looked pretty banged up.

>
"I came ta fetch ya, what else? Its about time fer da singin contest down at O'Connor's an dey got tired a waitin fer ya." She forced a smile, and Aiden tried to return it.

>
Maggie gestured to the window, "So I figure dats da best way ta get us out, the other door is chained an locked on both sides." Aiden struggled to stand, "Dats goin ta take a little work."

>
"All the more reason fer us ta start quickly, before anyone comes back." A look of fear flickered across Aiden's face. He got to his feet quickly and surveyed the window.

>
"Looks like one of us'll have ta boost de other an den the other'll have ta pull dem--"

>
He froze at the sound of footsteps. Someone was coming down the hall. "Maggie!" He whispered, "hide! Yer not supposed ta be here!"

>
Maggie was already by the window, "Come on Aiden we can make it!"

>
"Go!"

>
"Without you? Have ye lost what little part a yer brain ye have?"

>
"Maggie!"

>
Just then the door burst open and a large man with a stick and ring of keys in his hand stood framed in the light from the doorway. Maggie and Aiden's faces were both caught in the glow.

>

>
"And who the hell are you? Nevermind, yer comin along den. The Wringer wants another few words with you Murphy," he turned from Aiden to rake his eyes up and down Maggie's form, "And I'm sure we can find some use for your little friend."

>
Maggie tried to dart but the man had her about the waist, and he kept Aiden moving along with threats and prods in the kidneys.

>
He usherd them harshly across the vast empty floor of what used to be a cannery, and into the office at the far end. Inside the smoke-filled room was a wiry man of average height sitting behind a desk. Maggie could only guess that this was The Wringer.

>
The Wringer leaned back and took a puff of his cigar, his eyes

focusing on Maggie. "And who is this?" His voice hissed like a snake. He gestured for the goon to bring her closer, and a punch in the kidneys sent Maggie stumbling toward the desk.

>
"Found her tryin ta bust our Murphy sir. Thought you might like ta see her."

>
"Hmmm, yes, very nice. A little dirty, but if we clean her up she could fetch a fine price."

>
Maggie spit in his face. The Wringer automatically drew back his hand and gave Maggie such a fierce backhand blow she fell to the floor in a sprawl. Her father's pocket watch fell out of her coat pocket.

>
The Wringer saw it and snapped his fingers, "Bring that here, perhaps I can sell that too."

>
The goon picked it up and placed it in his outstretched hand. The thin, scaly hands turned the watch over and over again. "Why does this look so familiar..." he rubbed away some of the tarnish on the back, enough to read the name "Frances O'Rourke" Maggie's grandfather.

>
"O'Rourke...Charlie O'Rourke! The god damn Irishman who couldn't pay his debts. The one that died and still didn't leave enough!" He smiled cruelly at Maggie on the floor. "So nice of you to return to pay your debt Miss O'Rourke, I'm sure Mr. Flynn is much obliged to you. Now you can pay right along with your friend."

>

>
When Maggie awoke she was bound hand and foot, and she hurt more than she could ever remember. More than the caning in the factory, more than the beating with the Kat, this was a deep throbbing pain. Her right shoulder was on fire, but the majority of the pain seemed to come from bruises, at least she wouldn't have too many more scars.

>
It was the memory of what the men had done to amused themselves once Aiden passed out and she was the only one conscious that made her want to throw up. She had never felt so powerless in all her life as she had when they were playing their little "games". She tried to shut the memory out but still it came.

>
Focus girl, she thought to herself, get yerself out of here an deal with dat later. She looked around for Aiden, and saw him still crumpled on the floor. He had lost a lot more blood then she, and she didn't know how much he had lost before she came. She had to get them out of here. They'd been left for dead, that she knew. There was no reason to keep either one alive, she'd heard that much discussed between the Wringer and his goons before she blacked out.

>
Please God don't let dem try ta burn dis place down, I can't take another fire. Maggie grimly remembered how every other situation in her life was tied to fire somehow. She cursed up a storm getting to her feet, and hopped over to a broken pane of glass, using it to cut her bonds.

>
Of course, if they just disappeared, it wouldn't be long until they came looking for them again. Maggie sighed, one way or another, the building would probably end up a bit singed. Just enough to overcome the two unfortunate individuals inside. She thought to herself. She didn't have long to brood when she heard footsteps. She crouched behind a crate with the glass in her hand, waiting to jump a goon or the Wringer. She jumped on Patty instead.

>
"Patty! What in da world?"

>
Patty managed a tight smile. "I'm sorry it took so long darlin. But seein as you were probably out cold, I took da liberty a getting some supplies." He opened a bag containing a long fuse, several beer

bottles, a bottle of whisky, and a small barrel of gunpowder. "Wha do ye 'tink we can cook up with dis stuff?" Maggie actually grinned.

>
About half an hour later they were done. The abandoned building had been full of enough flammable material to keep a small fire going, enough to create billows of smoke that would lead to the "death" of two individuals. Patty was taking care of that detail, something about how not only Blackpool and Flynn could pay off cops and reporters. So Aiden lit the fuse and Maggie and Patty hurled the Maltov cocktails through the windows, and the three took off down the street.

>

>
A very tired Maggie trudged through the door of O'Connor's, helping an equally tired Patty carry a very unconscious Aiden into the room and lay him down on the floor. Bernadette O'Connor was already tending to him before Maggie and Patty could pull away. Maggie just sat down and pulled Aiden's head into her lap, stroking his hair as Douglas' wife took care of the wounds that were bleeding.

>
Patty stayed until it was certain Aiden was out of the woods, then he whispered a goodbye to Maggie and slipped out into the night.

>
Maggie didn't leave her friend's side until all of Bernadette's work was done. Aiden had come to an hour before and assured her he wasn't going anywhere. Maggie stayed with him a little longer, but when pearly pink rays started to glimmer across the horizon, she decided she had better head home. Patty had assured her his "whispering" network would have had news out three hours ago that the bodies of a young boy and girl were taken from the building and immediately cremated and placed in a potter's field, no one would be looking for her.

>
Wearily, she got to her feet, bid goodbye to the O'Connor's and started down the street. She hadn't moved more than twelve feet before she got dizzy, the world spun, she began to sway...

>
David caught her before she fell, scooping her into his arms with an uncanny feeling of deja voo. He smiled to himself as he set off toward the bridge.

>
He hadn't gotten far before a voice called out "You!" He looked around to see Spot Conlon marching down the street, pointing at him.

>
"What do you want Spot?"

>
"I don't want anytin ta do wid you Mouth, its dat little witch!"

>
David looked down at the bundle in his arms, "Spot, I don't really think this is the time to talk to her about that..."

>
"Aww shut up David. Dat goil is notin but troubles. Whats a mattah wid hoir dat she can't walk into my territory and not burn down a buildin, huh? And don't boddah telling me dat ain't her handiwoik south a Bushwick. Its god damn nearly right next ta da last place she boind ta da ground. Well, go boin down Manhattan from now on will yas? Dis place is crawlin wid da bulls now, how am I supposed ta carry on business?"

>
Maggie had woken up during all this. She wiggled out of David's arms and got shakily to her feet. "All right," she muttered through half closed eyes, "Come on, take yer best shot."

>
Spot looked at her, "Whatta you tawkin about?"

>
Maggie gave a sigh, "If ye wanna fight, den come on, lets go. If yer jest goin ta run yer mouth den wait till later I'm too tired at

da moment. What'll it be?"

>
Spot just looked at her, then threw up his hands. "I can't get no respect in my own territory. All right I'm lettin you off on dis one, but dis ain't over Irish, I promise."

>
Maggie was already asleep. "Have a nice day Spot!" David called to him too cheerfully as he took off with his burden down the street.

>

>
David reached the Lodging House just before the full sun broke through. Fortunately, Kloppman was awake, and he silently admitted David and pointed him up to the girls' room.

>
David pushed the door open with his toes, and carried Maggie to her bed, gently lifting her onto her top bunk. He took her shoes and coat off, grimacing at the bruises on her arms, legs, and face. He softly pulled the sheets over her and tucked them in. He smiled as he looked down on her, you would never tell from her serene face that she was such a spitfire when she was awake. He noticed the open window and decided not to go back down and disturb the whole house. He silently bent over Maggie and gave her a kiss on the forehead, then began to slip out onto the fire escape.

>
"Good night David, an tanks fer everyting."

>
David's head shot up, had Maggie said that to him or just in her sleep? He shrugged, figuring it must have been a mix of both.

>
"Sleep well Maggie, try to stay out of trouble." He though he heard a faint laugh as he made his way down towards the street.

>

End
file.